

Sanitized - Approved For Release : CIA-CPYRGHT

CPYRGHT

APR 23 1962

**BITTER DISPUTE REMAINS****The Cuban Fiasco, One Year Later**By PAUL W. BLACKSTOCK  
Department of International  
Studies

University of South Carolina

Last week marked the first anniversary of the ill-fated Cuban invasion incident which, even after a year, still remains a subject of bitter bureaucratic and partisan dispute.

Writing in the New York Times on April 14, 1961, just prior to the landing attempt, James

Reston observed: "The last time we intervened in a massive way in Cuba... President McKinley claimed to have the benefit of 'divine guidance' (which, it's true, wasn't very good). Teddy Roosevelt thought it would be 'good for the Navy,' and Secretary of State Hay thought it was a 'splendid little war.'"

TEN DAYS before our ill-fated intervention on April 4, 1961 President Kennedy personally polled the members of his National Security Council on the operation at a secret briefing by Mr. Richard M. Bissell, the C.I.A. Deputy who had master-minded the U-2 operation. All present, except Senator Fulbright, the only Congressman on hand, favored it; Adolph Berle, the State Department coordinator for Latin American Affairs, exclaimed, "Let her rip!" explaining that inevitably the U.S. would have to face up to a "confrontation with Communism" in this hemisphere, and the sooner the better.

Thanks to official leaks, the historical myth was developed that

the President and State Department caused "the fatal dismemberment of the whole plan" that due to "the doubts of Rusk, Fulbright and others... bit by bit, an operation that was marginal to begin with was so truncated as to guarantee its failure."

This is largely false. Let us look closely at the crucial decisions. At the April 4th and 5th meetings, the President made it perfectly clear that there would be no direct intervention by U. S. forces — including jet aircraft on the Carrier Boxer standing nearby. Any air strikes (such as the one on D-Day—minus two, which actually destroyed half of Castro's T-33 jet training planes), would have to be under "cover," i.e., by planes with Cuban air force markings.

THE COVER story was that the two planes which landed in Florida after the airstrike were flown by Cuban defectors, the idea being that the refugees could ask, "How could we bomb the airfields when we don't have any planes?"

This cover story was speedily exposed, but only after U. S. Ambassador to the U.N., Adlai Stevenson, had sworn before the Assembly that the planes were Castro's. After this prelude to the coming debacle, the second air strike was cancelled. But even then, C.I.A. did not call off the landing. The officials concerned were confident that, in case of need, "The inextinguishable military logic" of the situation would force a policy reversal from the President, and overwhelming jet air power, standing by on the U. S. Carrier Boxer, could be brought into play at the crucial moment. The President, however, could not ignore the Cuban in-

terground, one branch of which could have started a series of disturbances timed to coincide with the landing. The same reasoning accounts for the fact that instead of planning two or three simultaneous landings as feints to divide Castro's forces (and his remaining three or four jets), a single-thrust strategy was adopted.

Seen in this light, what on the surface appears to be an incredible military blunder of which even a school boy would be incapable becomes a perfectly credible mistake in political judgement, i.e., an error in assessing the character and determination of the President to stand fast on the original decision — to which all were a party.

Thus in the first weeks of April 1961 President Kennedy and the State Department attempted to carry out as a covert operation an undertaking which could not possibly have achieved its political objective (the overthrow of Castro and his replacement by a regime permanently acceptable to the Cuban people) even had the landing attempt succeeded. On the other hand, in spite of a national policy decision to the contrary, C.I.A. and the military advisors concerned continued to implement a military plan the success of which hinged on direct intervention, a plan which even had it succeeded militarily would not have secured the political objective sought.

National objectives cannot be reached by coordinating divided bureaucratic machines on different levels with a breakdown of effective communications between them, especially when neither side is in the desired objective.